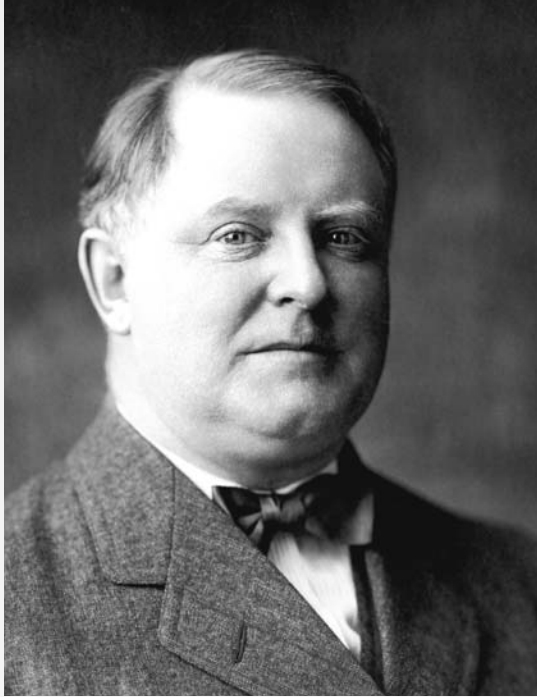


By the Kansas Historical Society

William Allen White Opponent of the Ku Klux Klan



William Allen White was an influential person and important reformer. He was editor of *The Emporia Gazette* newspaper and proud of his "country editor" style. Using the written word he was able to influence politics throughout America. He was friend and advisor to many presidents. White also received two Pulitzer Prizes for his writings.

In 1915 the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) that had terrorized African Americans in the South after the Civil War was reborn. The Klan's hatred was directed at minorities — not just African Americans but also Catholics, Jews, and immigrants. The group demanded "100 percent Americanism." From its rebirth in 1915 to 1924, the Klan expanded across the nation and claimed more than two million members.

Hiram W. Evans, imperial wizard, addressed the Ku Klux Klan convention held in Kansas City:

As this Western march built America, so it must save America. The Eastern states are almost submerged by the alien tide. The center of America's civilization of our group mind, of our racial power, of the hope for the future of our race lies in the great West.



Reform-minded Kansans, such as Governor Henry J. Allen and William Allen White, had reason to fear the growing influence of the KKK. The newspapers regularly reported on Klan activities.

Klan Enters Kansas

An organizer for the shrine of the Mystic White cloak, will be in Topeka this week to establish a chapter of the Ku Klux Klan, according to information received by Governor Allen today. It was said branches already have been established at Wichita, Hutchinson, Pittsburg, Independence, Arkansas City, El Dorado, Augusta, Columbus, and Marion.

– *The Emporia Daily Gazette*, July 25, 1921



Klan Warning –

Emporia, We Are Here!

"Citizens of Emporia we are here 500 strong, all law abiding men.

"Mr. County Attorney we are supporting you, to a man, "Mr. Sheriff you may count on us. We see and know everything.

"Mr. Chief of Police, do your duty and we are with you.

"Loafers, idlers, and vile-mouthed slanderers: Stay off the Streets ...

"Mr. law-abiding citizen of Emporia, we are here to help keep the proud reputation of our beautiful city up to the 100 per cent standard ...

"Emporia Klan.

"Realm of Kansas.

"Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

"Beware, we warn once."

– *The Emporia Daily Gazette*, January 15, 1923



"The Cyclops, pterodactyls, kleagles, wizards, and willopus-wallupeses began parading in the Kansas cow pastures ..."

– William Allen White, *Topeka Daily Capital*, September 23, 1924



White had no ambitions to run for public office until 1924. It was the rise of the KKK in Kansas and across the nation that drove him to go against his Republican Party. White began to campaign for governor of Kansas as an independent. White had seen government officials, including the police, in his hometown of Emporia being influenced by the Klan. He strongly believed that many of the politicians in the 1924 race were also in the "pocket of the Klan." To make the issue known to Kansans and Americans, he decided to run for governor. White didn't believe he could win as a third party candidate, but he knew he could call attention to the issues during the campaign.

My Dear Vic:

... Henry [Henry J. Allen, former governor of Kansas] called me up on the phone and wanted me to run for governor as an anti-Klan protest, with no desire to be elected. The devil with the proposition is that I might really be elected, which I don't want to be ...

William A. White

– Letter to Victor Murdock,
Wichita Eagle, August 14, 1924

WHITE ANNOUNCES

I have filed my petition for governor and am in this race to win. It is the largest independent petition ever filed for an office in Kansas. Over three times more names were signed to these petitions for Carr Taylor and myself for lieutenant governor and governor than were needed. None of these petitions came from my home town or county ... The issue in Kansas this year is the Ku Klux Klan above everything. The Ku Klux Klan is found in nearly every county. It represents a small minority of the citizenship and it is organized for purposes of terror. Its terror is directed at honest, law-abiding citizens, Negroes, Jews and Catholics. These groups in Kansas comprise more than one-fourth of our population ...

– *The Emporia Weekly Gazette*, September 23, 1924

White's six-week campaign was carried in newspapers across the nation. *The New York World* hailed White as a great American. Ernest Gruening, editor of *The Nation*, wrote to White:

For a generation you have been identified with all that is best and finest in the American tradition ... but nothing in your long career is as important, essential, and far reaching as your splendid stand.

Before I started on the campaign ... I got a letter from a Jew in southern Kansas who told me how his business had been hurt by the Klan and how his children had been bedeviled in school. It is one of the things that put steam in my spiritual engine when I went out ... I had a letter from him the other day ... he indicated ... that since I had made my campaign he had been living in a new world. The fact that I could get out and spit in the face of the Klan ... had cleared up the atmosphere, had sent people in his home town to his defense ... I am very proud of it all.

— Letter from W. A. White to A. E. Holt,
Chicago Theological Seminary, November 11, 1924



Although White didn't win the election he felt proud of his fight. During his campaign, White had asked people to vote for three anti-Klan candidates besides himself. The three men were elected by narrow margins. With anti-Klan public officials in office, the Klan was refused a charter to operate in Kansas. White's campaign and the publicity it received across America helped lead to the demise of the Klan.

